After the Flood

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After the Flood

by Beatricenius

Summary

“Do you need help leaving him?” Hannibal asks.

Will barks a laugh, agitation still etched in every line of his face. “I’m not leaving him.”

“Why?” Hannibal lets a faint note of pleading into his voice. “Please, Will. Talk to me.”

Will is in an abusive relationship. Hannibal knows and tries to help.

Notes

Once again I am writing about Will having a boyfriend that isn't Hannibal. This time it's a thoroughly terrible man though, and Will is arguably being saved by another thoroughly terrible man, so do mind the tags - it is kind of bleak. I still found it satisfying to write though, so I hope you'll enjoy it!

Hannibal watches Will's house from a distance, observing the yellow squares of his windows and the hazy, dark silhouette moving between them. It becomes clearer the closer he gets; the outline of Will's curly hair, a flash of blue from his eyes when he cracks open one of the windows, letting in the crisp night air.

Will never showed up to their appointment. Since they started seeing each other regularly, he has been unfailingly punctual, but not tonight. Hannibal wouldn't say he is worried as much as he is interested in the cause of his absence. When he inquired at Quantico, he was told Will was nowhere to be seen, which likely means something has kept him busy at home.

What Hannibal doesn't expect as he approaches the house is another silhouette. Once he's close, he can hear voices; loud and overlapping, muffled by the walls, but still distinguishable through the cracked open window.

"You know I have to go," Will says. "It's part of my job."

"I don't like the idea of you being alone in a room with another man. Is that really so strange to you?"

"You're being ridiculous. He's a psychiatrist."

"I thought you didn't even want to go to therapy."

"I don't. I have to." Will's voice grows softer, almost beseeching. "I—killed someone, Tom. I watched three people die. They're not letting me do my job without a psych eval, and it isn't over with yet."

Hannibal makes his way closer to the window as quietly as he can, standing with his back against the wall and risking a glance inside. His gaze lands on a strange man, dark-haired and of average build, likely between 30 and 45 years old. He is closing the distance between himself and Will, taking slow, deliberate steps.

"You could refuse," the man says, putting his finger in the center of Will's forehead. "You're valuable to them. I know you are. They'd still let you do field work. But you don't want to, do you? You want to lie on a couch talking about your little problems. Do you talk about me, Will?"

Will bats his hand away, face twisting in a grimace. "We don't even talk about my personal life," he says, growing frustrated once more. "I never even mentioned I'm a relationship."

"And why not, pray tell?"

"I'm telling you, because it's *not about that*. It's about me being fit for the field."

A hand wraps around Will's throat, squeezing around the base as the man backs Will up against a wall. Hannibal pads over to the next window to get a better vantage point, curious to see the culmination of the scene playing out before him.

“You goddamn liar,” the man hisses. “For as long as I’ve known you, therapy has been the one thing you refuse to try. Though *God knows* you could’ve used it. Now you suddenly can’t wait to go? What are you hiding?”

“Nothing.” Will’s words sound strangled, barely audible to Hannibal. “Tom, I wouldn’t lie to you. I just—”

“I’ve done everything for you. Anyone else would’ve left you here to rot with your demons by now, but I’ve stayed. People feel *sorry* for me, Will.”

Hannibal can’t quite make out Will’s response, but he sees the way the reaches up, hands fluttering over the man’s hand on his throat. He thinks Will may be telling him he is sorry.

“I don’t care,” the man says, “I care whether or not you’re hiding something from me.”

“I’m not,” Will says. “Tom, please.”

Hannibal can’t hear whether the man answers him or not, but he sees the moment Will is released. He stumbles a little, one hand flying up on reflex to clutch his throat while the man leaves the room, steps thumping heavy against the floorboards. He disappears into the murky inner parts of the house where Hannibal’s gaze can’t follow while Will remains where he was left, breathing hard with his eyes squeezed shut.

This is an unexpected development. Hannibal would never have been able to anticipate it; Will had been telling the truth when he said he never discussed being in a relationship. If anything, he has obscured all signs that might have pointed towards the possibility.

Hannibal debates whether to go back to his car or do as he planned and knock on the door. Showing up on their doorstep would surely lead to an escalation. He thinks about the rough hand around the pale column of Will’s throat, Will’s meek acceptance, so far removed from the image of Will Hannibal has cultivated in his mind, and wonders how hard the man would have to push for Will to defend himself. If he ever does, or ever would.

Curiosity finally wins out. He knocks, hearing the muted sound of barking dogs and shuffling feet. Then Will is opening the door.

“Dr. Lecter?” Will blinks, caught off guard, but he quickly schools his features. He clears his throat. “What brings you here?”

“You missed our appointment tonight,” Hannibal says. “I was worried when you didn’t show up.”

“Oh.” Will’s brow furrows as he feigns forgetfulness. It’s rather convincing. “What time is it?”

“Nearly nine o’clock.” Hannibal brings forth a faint smile. “I have a 24-hour cancellation policy, for future reference.”

“I must have lost track of time,” Will says. “I’m sorry. You didn’t have to drive all the way out here just for me.”

“I wouldn’t have if I didn’t want to.” Hannibal lets his smile drop, tilting his head with an expression of mild concern. “Are you alright?”

Before Will can answer, Hannibal hears the drag of familiar footsteps. Then the man Hannibal presumes to be Will’s partner is next to him in the doorway, giving him a searching look.

“Can I help you with something?” the man asks. Hannibal stretches out his hand.

“Hannibal Lecter. I’m Will’s psychiatrist.”

“Ah, so this is the doctor I’ve been hearing so much about,” the man says and smiles. He sounds friendly, no sign of animosity in his eyes. His grip is firm as he shakes Hannibal’s hand, but not in a way that betrays any kind of hostility. “I’m Thomas. Pleasure.”

“Entirely mine.”

“Now’s not a good time, I’m afraid.” He sounds genuinely apologetic, and Hannibal is impressed by his shift in behavior. He is almost pleasant. “Was there something urgent?”

“Not at all. I worried when Will didn’t show up to his appointment tonight.” He turns to Will, tone light. “But I see you’re in good hands.”

“That I am.” Will smiles. “I am sorry, though. Won’t happen again.”

They exchange polite goodbyes, then the door closes. Hannibal walks away, but doesn’t leave. He sticks around for long enough to hear more muffled yelling. He wonders if he’ll spot bruises on Will the next time he sees him, if he will see him in his office again at all, all things considered.

*

Will’s dedication to his calling must weigh heavier than his partner’s disapproval, because one week later, Hannibal opens the door to find Will in the waiting room, slumped in one of the chairs.

“Will,” Hannibal says, offering a genuine smile. “Come in, please.”

There is no difference in Will’s behavior. He still wanders around the office with his hands shoved deep in his pockets, offering tantalizing glimpses into the workings of his mind, occasionally pausing to mull over something Hannibal said. Hannibal enjoys sharing his thoughts with Will; he can tell he gives them genuine consideration, as gruff as his dismissals can sometimes be.

“How are things at home?” Hannibal finally asks when they’ve exhausted the topic of the Hobbs family. Will falters.

“It’s good,” he says. “You’ve met Tom.”

“Yes. I was unaware you’re in a relationship.”

Will shrugs. “We’ve been together almost ten years.”

A decade-long relationship. Hannibal resists a surprised lift of his brow.

“Is he someone you turn to for comfort, when darkness crowds your mind?”

“He is my partner,” Will says. It isn’t an answer to the question. “No, I don’t know. He doesn’t like what I do. Thinks it turns me into someone else.” Will smiles, off-kilter, and lowers his gaze. “He’s not wrong. Sometimes when I come home, I bring someone else with me.”

“Who are they?”

“Anyone who sticks.”

“Does it scare you?”

“No.” Will sits down in an armchair, releasing a shallow breath. “I know myself. It may get crowded in here,” he taps the side of his head, “but I know myself.”

“And who are you, Will?”

“Someone who’d never hurt someone I love.”

The reply comes so quickly, without hesitation. Hannibal knows Will must have thought of it often. He brings out a bundle of paperwork, handing it over to Will.

“Your psychological evaluation,” Hannibal tells him. “You are fit to return to the field.”

Will looks surprised. “We’re done here?”

“You tell me,” Hannibal says. “Do you think you need therapy?”

Will frowns. “Jack thinks I do. Tom—worries about me, sometimes.”

“What is your personal opinion?”

“I don’t think you’d like to hear my personal opinion.”

Hannibal smiles. “What you need is support. Freely given, without expectations, or the risk of personal involvement compromising it. Someone guiding you through the twisting tunnels of your mind.”

Will laughs. “Easier said than done.”

“That is what I’m offering you,” Hannibal says. “You don’t have to keep doing this alone, Will.”

Will watches him quietly for a moment. His eyes narrow. “You barely even know me. Why would you offer me that?”

“Why would you let Jack Crawford drag you from crime scene to crime scene, each more traumatizing than the one before? Why would you barge into an active one?” Hannibal tips his head to the side. “Some of us are blessed, and cursed, with a calling.”

Another moment of silence passes. Then Will nods. “Alright, then. We can try it.”

*

Despite what they agreed on, Will cancels his appointment next week – within 24 hours, as per policy. Hannibal makes note of it, but he doesn’t call, doesn’t go back to Will’s house. Will cancels their next appointment too, and that day, Hannibal does call.

“Things keep coming up,” Will says, apologetically, clearly lying. “Maybe keeping our appointments was a bad idea. I never seem to be able to take time off for them.”

“We can change the time, if you would prefer.”

Will is quiet for a beat. “Would it be out of line to ask if you can see me another time? Just this week.”

“I wouldn’t mind.” Hannibal decides to take a chance. “Would you like to come over for dinner tonight?”

“Dinner?” Will sounds genuinely surprised. Hannibal can almost see the widening of his eyes. “I don’t know. I think—I’m pretty sure Tom was hoping we could spend some time together tonight. He works late most other days.”

“You may bring him, of course,” Hannibal says.

“I’m sure he wouldn’t want to impose.”

“He wouldn’t. I’d love to cook for you both.”

Will is quiet for another beat. “Can I call you back?” he asks, sounding hesitant.

“Of course,” Hannibal says.

Will calls him about twenty minutes later, telling him they’ll come. Will is far from a bad actor; it’s hard for Hannibal to discern what’s lurking beneath his pretense of normalcy. He wonders if Will would have preferred it if Thomas declined. If Will, like Hannibal, suspects Thomas agreed to it in order to gather evidence to his theory about Will hiding something.

Just before seven o’clock, they arrive to Hannibal’s house. They seem like any couple, not very prone to public displays of affection, but the way the act, orbiting each other with ease and familiarity, instantly makes the nature of their relationship clear.

Will is drinking a little much, Hannibal notices. The wine makes his cheek ruddy, his smiles broader. He drums an uneven rhythm into the table with his fingers, and Thomas takes his hand, squeezes it, in a way that is meant to look affectionate. Will ducks his head and doesn’t resume his tapping once his hand is released.

“You’re a very good chef,” Thomas says and smiles, putting his cutlery down. “I heard as much from Will.”

“Thank you.” Hannibal smiles. “I don’t think Will was too pleased to have me show up unannounced in his motel room. But in my experience, a good meal is always welcome.”

“Your motel room?” Thomas turns to Will. “I thought you said Hannibal brought you and your boss breakfast at the crime scene.”

“Did I say that?” Will gives a weak smile. “I must have gotten mixed up.”

“Seems like it.” Thomas peels his gaze away from Will. There’s the smallest crack in his façade now, something threatening to break through. Hannibal reaches for the bottle of wine, giving them both an inquiring look.

“Refill?”

Will takes his glass and brings it closer to Hannibal, taking a measured sip once it’s filled. He casts a single, wary glance in Thomas’ direction as Hannibal pours wine for him as well.

*

A week later, Hannibal receives a call telling him to come to his own crime scene. When he asks why, Jack informs him Will could use his support. Hannibal gets into his car, and doesn’t ask if Will had been the one wanting him to come. It doesn’t matter; he isn’t passing up on the opportunity either way.

When he arrives, Will is sitting on the curb outside the house with his arms crossed over his knees. He looks up when Hannibal gets out of his car, taking a seat next to him on the sidewalk.

“You’ll ruin your clothes,” Will says.

“No more than you,” Hannibal counters.

Will smiles. “I don’t care about mine though.”

“What happened here?”

“Eric Reichardt, found dead in the basement.” Will clears his throat. “He was hung from the ceiling, but that’s not where he died. He’d been charged with murdering his wife and recently cleared of all charges. Next to him, all evidence against him had been hung. From the same kind of meat hooks he was strung on.”

“What kind of evidence?”

“Of domestic abuse that might have led up to her murder. There were—pictures of his wife’s face, bruised and cut. Testimonies.” Will shakes his head. “The floor was covered in blood. We don’t think it’s all his.”

“Any suspects?”

“I think it’s The Ripper,” Will says, immediately. “Jack doesn’t agree. I wouldn’t have either, I think. This is unlike him.”

A quiet thrum of pleasure courses through Hannibal. He can’t help it. It’s the thrill of being recognized, of knowing he’s moving through Will’s head, stirring up dust and leaving prints over the interior of his mind.

“So what makes it a Ripper kill?”

“The theatrics. The story. Reichardt was killed in a blood-soaked basement, hidden away with all his secrets. A reference to Bluebeard, if I ever saw one.”

“His wife didn’t make it out in time.”

“No, she didn’t.”

“Are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” Will pinches the bridge of his nose. “I have to be.”

“I’ll save that comment for therapy tonight.”

Will shakes his head. “I’m sorry, but—I can’t do it. I was going to tell you.”

“What is it you can’t do?”

“Therapy. I’m out.”

“Would you like to tell me why?”

Will sighs, but doesn’t say anything. Hannibal seeks his gaze and fails to capture it.

“Is it because Thomas disapproves?” he finally asks.

Will’s head whips up, eyes wide and wary. “Why would you think that?”

Hannibal knows it isn’t advisable, that confrontation is the last thing he should do if he wants to gain Will’s trust. Still, he decides to take yet another chance.

“I know he hurts you,” he admits. “I saw it when I came to your house a few weeks back. He was choking you.”

Will’s lips thin into a tight line, eyes gaining a hard glint. He almost looks angry, but he says nothing, only staring straight ahead.

“Do you need help leaving him?” Hannibal asks.

Will barks a laugh, agitation still etched in every line of his face. “I’m not leaving him.”

“Why?” Hannibal lets a faint note of pleading into his voice. “Please, Will. Talk to me.”

“Look, I know what domestic violence is,” Will says. “I could give a lecture on it. I have. But it’s complicated when you’re in it.” He pauses, letting out a deep breath. “He would ruin me. He would absolutely ruin my career, what I have left of my reputation. He’d take my dogs and my house. Trust me, it’s easier if I stay.”

“What kind of life is that? Staying with someone out of necessity.”

“It’s my life. For the past ten years.” Will closes his eyes. “Just do me a favor and drop our appointments. And stop asking us to dinner. He’s got some strange fixation on you. He’ll just use you as an excuse to hurt me.”

“I wager he will find an excuse either way.”

“Do you think he treats me that way all the time?” Will huffs. “We had a few good months before I met you. It ebbs and flows.”

“Then you know as well as I do it wouldn’t have lasted.”

“Even so.” Will rests his head on his arms, still folded over his knees. “He paints this picture of me where I’m flighty and clueless. Too mentally instable to know what’s good for me. In need of protection.”

“From what?”

“People who would like to climb my tower and whisk me away, I suppose.” Will gives a wry smile. “He doesn’t see how poorly these parts reflect reality. No one is looking at me like that, there are no suitors battling him for my hand. It doesn’t matter. The moment he thinks someone is getting too close to me, he loses it and accuses me of not seeing it. Or encouraging it and keeping it secret.”

“I am merely a psychiatrist connected to you through work.”

“Yeah. It’s a good thing I don’t have friends who could get caught up in it. He’s never even stopped being upset about Jack calling me at odd hours.” Will turns to Hannibal, the expression on his face somehow weary and urgent at the same time. “Just leave me alone, okay?”

“Obviously I’m not leaving you alone to deal with this, Will.”

“No, stop.” Will’s voice fills with an almost panicked insistence. “I’m not leaving. You can’t help me. So just stop. I mean it.”

Will gets up, walking over to Jack to exchange a few words with him before going back to his car. Hannibal watches him drive away, words left unsaid at the tip of his tongue.

*

Hannibal considers killing Thomas.

It’s a curious inclination, one that demands closer inspection. He thinks he may want Will to himself, and his partner is impractical. Aside from that, he considers this type of violence deeply distasteful – Will is special, yet he has fallen victim to such ordinary circumstances.

He wonders if Will would connect the dots. It’s not at all unlikely, and then, there is no telling what other conclusions he may reach. Hannibal would have to be careful, maybe stage an accident of some kind. But perhaps Will would see through that as well?

Hannibal has trouble even surmising how Will feels about his partner, if he loves him, or if whatever affection he used to feel for him has seeped out like blood across the floorboards. Ten years is a long time to make amends. To break promises. For wounds to scab and heal and scar, in complicated, unpredictable patterns.

*

When Hannibal finally does kill him, it’s not strictly according to plan, and it isn’t strictly against it. Since Will terminated their sessions, Hannibal has started driving out to his house at night, observing the life he shares with Thomas. It’s a little like theatre, the light of day dimming to give way to the illuminated stage behind square windows.

Will’s life consists of strict routine. He leaves and comes home roughly the same time every day, unless there is a crime scene for him to analyze. Thomas is far more difficult to predict; Hannibal remembers Will telling him he works late most of the time, and he can’t help but wonder if that is what he’s truly doing.

When Thomas does come home, he and Will usually have a late dinner – sometimes take out, sometimes food Will has prepared before Thomas’ arrival. Afterwards, Thomas cleans up while Will takes the dogs out. Before going to bed, they both open up their laptops, presumably working.

Once, Hannibal sees them having sex. Will goes to bed early and Thomas slides between the sheets around midnight, like something that goes bump in the night. He fits himself against Will’s back, and Hannibal doesn’t realize what he’s doing until he hears a soft grunt through the window, followed by a small, wavering moan. From his vantage point, Hannibal can see Will being rolled onto his back, limp like a doll, one ankle propped up on Thomas’ shoulder. The bare, vulnerable arch of his foot catches the light of the moon as Thomas’ thrusts jar him against the bedframe.

Hannibal doesn’t see Thomas being violent with Will like the first time he visited Wolftrap. He doesn’t even see them arguing. They share a deceptively peaceful life together, quiet and uncomplicated.

It's when Thomas comes home in a bad mood that things take a turn for the worse. Hannibal can’t tell what the cause of this shift in his temperament is, if Thomas is drunk, or if it’s due to something that happened when he was away from home. Either way, Will can barely look at him without being snapped at, and he does all but tiptoe around him all night. When they go to bed, they sleep as far apart as the bed allows.

Not long after the light has left their windows, Will's phone lights up the room. Hannibal can hear the faint, almost inaudible sound of its vibration, and he watches Will get up to answer the call, padding into another room with the phone against his ear.

Hannibal wonders who it is – most likely Jack, but he can't know for sure. Seconds later, Thomas sits up in bed, searching for Will in the room. Hannibal can't see it, but he can imagine the darkening of his face when he realizes he's gone with his phone. He follows Will into the part of the house where Hannibal loses sight of them.

There's a thump. The scrape of furniture and muffled voices. Finally, Thomas emerges again, dragging Will along with a tight grip on his arm. He shoves him forward, almost making him fall to the floor.

"I thought we talked about this."

"Tom, it's my *job*. I can't—"

"*Liar*!" Thomas pushes Will in the chest, making him stumble and fall. "I don't fucking believe you. What kind of boss calls an employee at all hours?" Hannibal feels a pang of surprise as he sees Will being kicked in the stomach, hard. "Huh?"

"It's a crime scene," Will's voice is pitched higher, on the verge of frantic. "It can't wait until morning. Tom—"

"You're not going."

"What?" Outrage trickles into Will's voice. "It's a matter of life and death. You can't stop me."

"We'll see about that." Thomas sits on top of him, grabbing a fistful of Will's hair and using his grip to bring his head down on the floor with a dull thump. He does it again, and again, then he grabs Will's throat with both hands.

"Say you're not going."

Hannibal can't hear any response. He sees Thomas bringing his fist down into Will's stomach. "*Say it*."

"Tom, you're hurting me." Will's voice is choked, so quiet Hannibal can barely make it out, and Thomas hits him again.

Hannibal has seen enough. In the commotion, it's easy to push open the perpetual half-open window a little further, to make his way inside and pad over to the toolbox he never saw Will putting away that night. The dogs are barking, but they were even before Hannibal entered the room, hiding away in the far corners of the room.

The hammer is a soothing weight in Hannibal's hand, and he meets Will's gaze, seeing the wide and terrified cerulean blue of his eyes the split second before he raises the hammer and brings it down hard into the back of Thomas' head.

It's a precise blow. Thomas falls to the side and Will skitters back, looking so confused, so scared, still, that it has serpentine pleasure coiling in Hannibal's gut.

"Hannibal?" Will says, incredulous. "What are you doing here?"

"Jack called about a crime scene," Hannibal lies, keeping the details as vague as possible. "I thought I might offer you a ride."

"Why? How—did you get here so fast?" Will's brows draw together. Hannibal does his best to feign shock, letting his hand spasm around the hammer before dropping it to the floor. Will flinches from the sound and his eyes widen, panic overtaking his face once more.

"Is he—?" he doesn't finish the sentence, only crawls over to Thomas and checks his pulse. He pales.

"Oh, no," he whispers. "Oh, God."

"Will, he was hurting you. He needed to be stopped."

Will's chin trembles. He takes his hand off of Thomas' neck, gaze still fastened on his slack face, his wide-open eyes. The blood glittering in his dark hair when the light hits. One of the dogs cautiously pads up to the body and whines, and Will pets its shaggy head.

"He would have stopped," Will says.

"Would he?"

"He wasn't trying to kill me."

"He might have either way." Hannibal drops down to his knees, sitting across from Will with Thomas between them.

"I have to call the police," Will says. He considers for a moment, then looks up at Hannibal. "You should leave. I won't tell them, I'll get rid of your prints, just—go."

Hannibal cocks his head, surprised and intrigued. "What would you tell them?"

"I don't know. He was hurting me and I defended myself." Will squeezes his eyes shut, mouth tightening. "No one is going to believe me. Tom was well-liked. I was the weird one. I don't have proof of—of anything. He does."

"What do you mean?"

"He went to the police after I hit him back once. People will think I abused him, and killed him."

"Why didn't you go to the police yourself?"

A small, scornful laugh is shaken out of Will's bruised throat. "Are you kidding? I couldn't even document any of it. He looked through my phone. Every day." He scoots back again,

arms wrapped around his knees. “I’m going to jail for this.”

“You are not,” Hannibal protests, but he can tell Will isn’t listening. He seems enclosed in a world of his own. Hannibal puts his hands on Will’s shoulders until he looks up.

“You are not going to jail, and we are not calling the police. It’s important that we talk now, alright?” Hannibal tries to make his voice commanding, but gentle. “Then, we are getting rid of the body.”

*

They end up agreeing on a story. Thomas left for work that morning and didn’t return. Will thinks he went on a bender, which has happened twice before during the course of their relationship. Will is going to call the police after 24 hours, then again after 48 hours, if they don’t take his concerns seriously the first time. They plan for a variety of different outcomes after that. There’s no knowing exactly what will happen, after all.

Will helps Hannibal fit the body into a clear garbage disposal bag, which isn’t what Hannibal would have preferred, but it is the only option he has. There is a shed on Will’s property with plenty of tools Hannibal might have used to make the future disposal easier, but he figures it’s better Will doesn’t see the familiarity with which he saws through bones, the almost meditative peace it brings him – not yet, anyway. He assures Will he will take care of it, privately enjoying the visual of Will helping him heft the body into his car.

There is a flicker of something in Will’s eyes when he stares down at the gruesome plastic bag in Hannibal’s trunk, something that makes Hannibal think of blood-stained glasses and the scent of gun powder on Will’s hands. Whatever it is, it’s devoid of regret, glimmering like precious stones. He thinks it might be satisfaction.

When Hannibal cleans the house, Will insists on joining him. Thomas had mostly bled on a carpet that joined him in the garbage bag along with the hammer, but they still clear the floors of any potential evidence. Hannibal watches Will scrubbing intently at the place where his carpet used to be, catching the moment a tear rolls down his face. It’s quickly wiped away by his hand, almost absently.

Hannibal stands, walking to the kitchen to fetch a chair. “Will you humor me and sit for a moment?” he asks. “I’d like to examine you.”

“That’s not necessary.”

“I did say you would be humoring me.”

Will pauses, but he does as he’s told, slowly making his way over to the chair. Hannibal touches the back of his head with gentle fingers, feeling the egg-like bump beneath silky curls, tender and swollen and hot. He can feel the ridges of a small scar on Will’s scalp and wonders if that is the work of Thomas as well, but he doesn’t ask. When Will is told to follow Hannibal’s finger, he can only do so for a moment before he closes his eyes, carefully shaking his head.

“You likely have a concussion,” Hannibal says. “Are you nauseous?”

Will huffs. “I don’t think anyone would blame me for that.”

“Even so. Headache?”

“Yes.”

“Probably concussed, then.” Hannibal eyes him for a moment. “Would you take off your shirt?”

“We really don’t have to do this.”

“No,” Hannibal agrees, “but I would like us to. I saw him kick you in the stomach.”

Will’s fingers flutter over the collar of his shirt. Then he unbuttons it, letting it fall and bunch around his lap. Hannibal takes in the sight for a moment: Will’s skin, smooth and pale like marble, marred by fading bruises. No cuts or burns or abrasions, only purple melting into blue and yellow and green, from the base of his throat to the knob of his hip.

Hannibal wonders what the rest of him looks like, but he has no excuse to inquire about it, and drops the thought quickly.

It takes him mere seconds to establish Will has a broken rib, probably not from that night. Watching Will barely even wince when he puts pressure on it fills him with a peculiar anger, one that didn’t even touch him as he saw Thomas slamming Will’s head into the floor. He will pick it up for closer examination later. For now, he loses himself in his role as doctor and concerned friend.

“You have a broken rib, though I suspect you are aware,” Hannibal says. “Apart from that, I have no immediate concerns. Though I would like to have you properly examined, in a clinical setting where your wounds could be tended to.”

“There’s nothing to be done about any of them,” Will says. “I just have to wait. They’ll fade in time.”

“He hit you where it won’t show,” Hannibal says, pointing out the obvious.

Will shrugs. “It’s not uncommon for abusers.”

“It’s appalling.”

“Yeah.” Will grabs his shirt and puts it back on, buttoning it up all the way to the top button. It doesn’t quite hide the red handprints Thomas left earlier that night; a lapse in self-control. “He didn’t deserve to die though.”

Will sounds calm despite everything, and so completely sincere Hannibal almost can’t believe it.

“He has tormented you for years,” Hannibal points out.

“He didn’t deserve to die for that,” Will says. His gaze drops into his lap. “He might have brought me suffering, from time to time. But I brought death into his life.”

“You can’t blame yourself for something I did.”

“You were protecting me.” Will shakes his head. “I should say thank you. I know you just tried to help. But I’ve indirectly ruined two lives today. Three, if I count mine. We’re not getting away with it.”

“He did deserve to accept consequences to his actions. And we are getting away with it.”

Will looks at him, surprised, now. “You’re angry with him.”

“Of course I am. He was hurting you, deliberately and methodically.”

“What’s it to you?”

“You are my friend.”

Will looks down again. He bites his lip, quiet and tense, shoulders drawn up.

“You’re angry with me,” Hannibal observes, echoing Will’s words.

“I don’t know what I am.” Will pauses. “It doesn’t add up. I don’t know why you were here tonight in the first place. Why you did this. It's not to be my friend, not just, anyway. I can tell as much.”

“Perhaps not.” Hannibal reaches out, taking Will’s hand. It’s clammy and rough, skin reddened from cleaning the floor without gloves. Will’s brows draw together in confusion, and Hannibal remains quiet, giving his words time to sink in. Realization dawns and Will stares at him.

“You don’t mean that.”

“I do.” And he does, although he would rather not see his attraction to Will as something so simple as that. “Naturally, I have no expectations.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“If you would like me to leave, I will. If you don’t wish to speak to me right now—”

“It’s not that.” Will falters, then crumbles. His hand tightens around Hannibal’s. “Please, don’t leave. I don’t think I can be alone right now.”

“Then I will stay.”

“Can we go to bed?”

Hannibal nods. He dresses down to his undershirt and underwear while Will goes to the bathroom, emerging once more in sweatpants and a T-shirt. He still smells faintly of bleach,

as Hannibal knows he himself does.

There is a text from Jack on Hannibal's phone, asking if he knows where Will is. He sends a quick message back, letting Jack know he's spoken to him on the phone. He references the story they agreed on, telling him Will is worried about his partner. Then he puts his phone on silent and leaves it next to Will's.

Will curls up on the outer edge of the bed with the covers wrapped tight around him and Hannibal makes himself comfortable next to him. Will is facing away from him, quiet and still like a painting, like he's already fallen asleep.

"What if I just turned myself in instead?" Will suddenly says, voice lowered to an almost-whisper. "No one has to know you were here. There's no reason for you to be. No one would even consider it a possibility."

"Nonsense," Hannibal tells him. "You want to turn yourself in because you feel responsible."

"I am," Will snaps. He draws a deep breath and releases it. "When I was a kid, I always figured this is how I'd end up. First I thought I'd go to prison. Then I thought I'd end up at some mental facility. I've prepared all my life."

"Except you have done nothing to warrant being imprisoned. You are free, Will, more so now that Thomas has been removed from your life, I should think."

Will huffs; a small, bitter laugh. "Free to do what?"

"Whatever you like."

Will turns, looking at Hannibal with soft, shrouded eyes. He scoots a little closer, watching Hannibal like he's trying to solve a puzzle, which may be what he's doing. Then he slowly leans in, pressing a soft kiss to Hannibal's mouth. When Hannibal doesn't pull away, he does it again, kissing him a little longer this time. Hannibal lets him, opening his mouth at the gentle nudge of Will's tongue and savoring every little noise escaping his mouth, every wet slide of his lips across his own.

"I haven't kissed anyone else in a long time," Will says when they part. "I thought about it a lot."

"You never had an affair?"

Will shakes his head. "It wouldn't have been worth the fallout."

Hannibal lets his hands skim over Will's hips. He can tell from the bulge in Will's sweatpants that he's already half-hard. "What do you want, Will?" he asks, letting his hands slide in under his T-shirt, just slightly, touching warm, soft skin.

Will's hips jerk, seemingly on reflex. He swallows. "What can I have?"

"Anything."

“Can you keep touching me?”

Hannibal does, cupping the slight, dough-like softness of Will’s stomach, feeling the muscle jump beneath his palm. He pulls Will closer, fingers trailing down his spine, but when they reach the waistband of Will’s underwear, Will squirms slightly in his arms.

“I don’t want you to fuck me,” he says. “I’m sorry. I just—”

“That’s fine,” Hannibal says. He presses his palm between Will’s legs, moving his hand in gentle circles until a small gasp slips past his lips. “Can I use my mouth?”

Will nods, and Hannibal sits between his legs, helping Will out of his pants and underwear. His knees are bruised, enough that Hannibal’s thoughts wander back to Thomas, but he won’t ask. Will’s cock is flushed and hard, framed by dark hair, not quite long enough to curl. It’s a little bigger than Hannibal’s, both thick and long where it curves up towards his stomach, where Hannibal is sure Will must still be sore.

He is impatient for Will to heal, for all traces of Thomas to vanish from his body. For now, he can only add to the marks, so when he puts both hands on Will’s hips he lets his thumbs dig a little harder than necessary into the bruised skin draped across his hip bones.

Will makes a small, pained noise, ending on a breathless gasp as Hannibal wraps his lips around his cock and sucks. The taste of bitter salt coats the roof of Hannibal’s mouth and he teases the slit with the tip of his tongue, savoring Will’s helpless squirming, the little noises he is able to pull from him.

“Fuck, Hannibal,” Will moans. Fingers weave into Hannibal’s hair as he keeps sucking, relaxing his throat to take all of Will’s cock into his mouth, past the resistance at the back of his throat. Saliva floods his mouth and pours from his lips, turning everything slick and wet and messy, but he doesn’t mind. It seems fitting, and the choked, clicking noises in his throat make Will come undone beneath him.

“Wait,” Will says, almost stumbling over the single syllable, “Hannibal, I’m going to come.”

Hannibal squeezes around Will’s hips and tightens the seal of his lips, redoubling his efforts. Will draws a sharp breath and spills down his throat seconds later, trembling, his hands unsteady in Hannibal’s hair.

Once Hannibal sits back up again, Will palms his cock through his underwear. Hannibal stops him with a gentle hand around his wrist.

“You don’t have to reciprocate.”

“Don’t you want me to?” Will sounds uncertain. Then his gaze hardens. “I’m not broken.”

“I never said you were. I’m merely reassuring you. It’s okay to stop.”

“I’d like you to come too.” Will wets his lip, giving him a searching look. “Can I watch when you—touch yourself?”

“If you’d like.”

Will gives a crooked smile. “I’d like.”

“Alright, then.” Hannibal puts a pillow against the bedframe and gets comfortable, kicking his underwear down to the foot of the bed. He is still hard from sucking Will’s cock, a light touch of his own fingers against the shaft enough to make arousal pool between his legs.

“Hold on,” Will says. He grabs Hannibal’s hand and brings it to his mouth, licking a wet trail across his palm. He pauses near his fingertips, letting more spit drip down from them. Hannibal watches Will’s slick, reddened lips close around the tip of one finger, relishing the wet warmth, the ring of blue around his blown pupils, making his eyes appear so large in the murky light of the room. He wonders if this is how Will had seen him when he was on his knees between his legs. A wild thing, free of inhibitions.

Will releases his hand and Hannibal wraps it around his cock, eyes falling closed as Will’s spit makes it glide easily over the hot, sensitive skin. He watches Will watching him, finding pleasure in Will’s eyes on him, so focused, so full of conflicting emotion.

“What are you thinking about?” Will asks.

Hannibal is thinking about the possibilities now that Thomas is out of the way. He is thinking about the glimmer of vindictive pleasure he had seen in Will’s eyes when he stared down at the dead body of the man he spent a decade with. The empty spaces left behind, there for Hannibal to fill.

“I’m thinking about you,” Hannibal says.

“What am I doing?”

“You’re mine,” Hannibal says, an admission more honest than he might have expected of himself. Will looks momentarily taken aback too.

“What happened to my freedom?”

“All I want is for you to be free,” Hannibal says. “You use your freedom to choose me.”

Will searches Hannibal’s face with those attentive, almost invasive eyes. Then he leans down and presses his lips to Hannibal’s, fingers digging into his cheek as he angles Hannibal’s face in his hands and kisses him deeper. Hannibal stutters out a groan, hand moving faster, and when Will captures his bottom lip between his teeth, Hannibal comes, thrusting into the slick tunnel of his own hand.

They part. Once again, Will takes Hannibal’s hand, this time to suck his fingers clean. It’s an act of tenderness, almost with an air of sanctity. Will’s takes his time, licking between his fingers, in the creases of his palm, pulling off with a wet pop. Hannibal can only stare up at him in wonder.

“What are you going to do with the body?” Will asks, still holding his hand in both of his. There’s a sunbeam across his face, brightening the light blue of his eyes.

“Do you truly want to know?”

“Tell me.”

“I’m going to cut it up,” Hannibal says. “Then I will dispose of it.”

“I want to watch.”

Hannibal studies his face for a moment. “Why?”

“I’ve seen it in my head, so many times. Not him, specifically. But every crime scene I go to, I see the designs.”

“It is gruesome to you, even when restricted to the realm of your imagination.”

Will says nothing, setting Hannibal’s hand back down again. “I want to see,” he says, unwavering in his determination this time. Hope, foolish and tentative, rises in Hannibal like the tide.

“After work,” Hannibal says, casting a glance out the window. The sun has made its way above the horizon, its light nearly blinding. He sees Will’s smile through a filter of bright white when he glances back.

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